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**CERTIFICATION OF STATE REGISTER LISTING**

The Register of Historic Kansas Places includes all Kansas properties nominated to the National Register as well as lower threshold properties which are listed on the state register only.

Property Name: Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church

Address: 9 Miles NW Eureka, KS

Legal:

County: Greenwood

Owner: Pastor Gruner, Christ Lutheran Church

Address: 315 N. Elm Street, Eureka, KS 67045

National Register eligible \_\_\_\_\_

State Register eligible   X  

This property was approved by the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review for the Register of Historic Kansas Places on December 9, 2000.

I hereby certify that this property is listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places.

Richard D. Pankratz  
State Historic Preservation Officer

12-11-00  
Date

9/95

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE UPPER FALL RIVER EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

The Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church (c. 1921), which is often referred to as the "Norwegian" Church, is located on the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of S. 2, T. 25, R. 9, in South Salem Township, Greenwood County (pop. 8090) Kansas. The grounds for the church and its accompanying cemetery are two acres running north and south along the west side of the extreme southwest corner of the section.

The property is in a rural area at the crossroads of county road 15-31, which is known locally as the River Road, and township road T-38 which runs east and west on the south side of the church property. The township road is the only road in that area which goes west to the Flint Hills and the Greenwood-Butler County line.

The church is a one-story frame building with a hip roof. It is rectangular in shape with a bell tower which extends four feet farther west and south than the church rectangle. The bell tower is also frame. The entire building is, and always has been, painted white.

There are four double-hung frosted windows on both the north and the south sides. A similar but much larger window graces the west (front) side. All the windows have wooden insets which give the illusion that the windows are arched.

A 1937 picture looks as if the roof was covered by wooden shingles; however, members now living cannot recall anything prior to the use of composition shingles of a neutral color.

The church faces the west. The sides are 15  $\frac{1}{4}$ ' in height. The north elevation measures 40.5' from east to west, and the east elevation measures 30.5' from north to south. The four-sided bell tower was designed to extend beyond the southwest corner of the church proper. For that reason the south

elevation of the church is but 36.5' from east to west, and the west elevation is but 26.5' from north to south. Those measurements leave the southwest corner with a diagonal space between the bell tower and the sanctuary.

The east elevation of the bell tower joins the south elevation of the church and is only 4' from north to south; the south elevation is 8' from east to west; the west elevation is 8' from south to north; and the north elevation is only 4' from west to east where it connects to the west facade (front) of the church proper.

The bell tower is 25  $\frac{3}{4}$ ' high. It has a four-sided roof and is capped with a Celtic cross. There are louvres high on all four sides, and under them large circles decorate the west and south sides.

A large metal door on the front (west) side of the bell tower is the entrance to the church. It also bears a Celtic cross.

Inside the bell tower two swinging doors fill the aforementioned diagonal space and open into the sanctuary.

The entire interior of the church is the sanctuary with the exception of a small room in the southeast corner which measures 8' wide and 10.5' long. It was designed to be the Sunday School room for the very young children. An exterior door at the east end of the room provides a fire escape. Another door on the west wall of the room opens into the sanctuary and a third door opens to the platform.

The platform extends across the east end of the sanctuary. The front of the platform joins the front of the Sunday School room and goes due north for 7'. It turns northwest for 10' at a 135° angle and curves from that point to the north wall for a distance of 4' 6".

The platform has always been carpeted. The pulpit, communion rail, altar, and piano are all arranged in their proper places.

The sanctuary walls have been plastered and painted an off-white color for many years. In the early seventies the deterioration of the plaster was the impetus for paneling the walls and lowering the ceiling. Those changes along

with the storm windows made the sanctuary more comfortable in the winter.

The central aisle of the church starts at the swinging doors and extends diagonally (northeast) across the sanctuary to a point on the platform where the pulpit is situated.

There are pews on either side of the aisle. They are of various lengths. They had previously been used by a Eureka church and were given to the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church at the time the church was built (1921).

The floor, the baseboard, the window frames, and the interior sides of the doors are varnished. The women of the congregation did the varnishing. The men painted the interior walls and the exterior of the church.

Heat for the building is provided by a small stove which burns propane. In earlier years, coal or wood was the fuel. There has been electricity in the church and the surrounding community since the 1920s. In 1975 paneled walls and a lowered ceiling were installed and the metal sanctuary door was installed.

The original building materials for the church were purchased in Eureka. One carpenter was hired and the men in the congregation helped as they had free time from their farming responsibilities. The carpenter was a young man named Elmer Olson who was taught his skills by his father. He was responsible for the unique floor plan. The propane tank is near the fence south of the church. A small white building behind the church houses an outdoor toilet and a room which originally was for coal storage but currently it is filled with odds and ends.

The Upper Fall River (Norwegian) Cemetery is on the north end of the property. Most of the early pioneers are buried there--as are many of their descendants. Other people--besides the Norwegians, who live in or near the community and have attended or belonged to the church--are welcome to make it their final resting place also. A traditional sign is in place near the front entrance of the church. It proclaims sermon topics and other important information.

## **SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT**

**The Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church (c. 1921) is being nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places under criterion C for its architectural significance as an example of a vernacular church with fenestration influences from the Gothic tradition. The church is a one-story frame building with a hip roof. It is rectangular in shape with a bell tower. The church is also being recognized under criterion A for its association with the rural Norwegian community of which it is part of. The church stands at a crossroads in a rural location. The closest town is Eureka which is nine miles southeast of the church.**

**As with so many buildings done in the vernacular tradition, the church is a functional, transitional design. Without the tower it might be a school or even a house if viewed from afar. The rectangular, truncated hipped roof frame building takes its form from early twentieth century utilitarian architecture. The addition of the tower provides a defining element for the building. The placement of the offset tower may have been suggested by Lutheran synod designs for rural churches of the time. Another element that importantly links the building to the tradition of church building is the lancet windows. While the building is not a high style example of any style it is an important representative of a vernacular church structure that refers to both the tower and the lancet windows for its visual typology.**

**The Evangelical Lutheran Congregation was organized on October 5, 1869, in the home of Ole S. Ladd. At that time, the congregation was affiliated with the Augustana Synod. On June 15, 1878, Mr. Berul Johnson deeded two acres of land to the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. One acre was for the church itself, and the other was for a cemetery.**

**Since the Norwegian settlement was quite isolated from Eureka and other settlements by distance and poor roads, money was replaced by barter in many of their community transactions. It was very difficult for them to amass the funds**

necessary to build a church.

Those "waiting" years were marked by several changes in the community. The influx of Norwegians began to wane and several English-speaking families began to homestead or purchase land that was available in the area. Also, some rural schoolhouses were beginning to make their appearances. The Anderson, Holverson, and Noeller schools were among the first. Those mixed-language changes gave the children some exposure to the English language.

In 1884, the congregation had sufficient funds, and the church was finally built. It was a rectangular building with a bell tower in the front (west) which provided the entrance to the church. For the next 36 years the congregation enjoyed the new facility.

It was more difficult for the elderly folks to learn English so the church continued to have services in Norwegian. At some point they began to have two services on Sunday--one in Norwegian and one in English. Quite a number of the elderly people began moving into Eureka where life was easier and they could be near doctors, etc.

The congregation of the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church decided to build a small church in Eureka where their retired members could have Norwegian services, and in time, also English. The church was built at the corner of First and Sycamore Streets and was named St. Paul's Church. It was dedicated on May 21, 1911.

A small parsonage was built beside the church, and it became the home of the pastors who served the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church, the St. Paul's Church, and the small Otter Creek community of Norwegians who used a rural schoolhouse in lieu of a church.

During the years that the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Congregation attended church in their new building, ten different pastors served them.

On May 4, 1920, disaster struck! A devastating tornado completely destroyed the church and all of the buildings on the Omundson farm which was across the road and a bit southeast of the church. The tornado kept on its path and did considerable damage in Eureka. Several people were injured but no one was killed. Sadly, all of the church records that had been kept up to that point were lost in the storm.

The Evangelical Lutheran Congregation immediately began making plans to rebuild. They hired Elmer Olson to be the carpenter. He was a local young man who had recently returned from being in World War I. His father had taught him his carpentry skills. Men in the community agreed to assist him as they could spare the time.

*The Eureka Herald* reported that The Kansas-Oklahoma Circuit of the Iowa District would meet with the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Congregation on November 26, 27, and 28, 1921. On Sunday, November 27, the new church was dedicated by the Hon. H. C. Holm, the president of the Iowa District.

The "Upper Fall River" column in the December, 1, 1921, *Herald*, reported the following week that, "The church is completed and was dedicated Sunday with a big crowd in attendance and several extra ministers assisted with the service. There were also services Monday and Saturday.

Just three years before the first church was destroyed, an exciting event occurred several miles southwest of the church. Oil was discovered in the Sallyards area just north of the road now known as Highway 54, where Greenwood County joins Butler County. That was exciting for all the people in Greenwood County. The Norwegian community was not far from Sallyards.

In 1922, other oil strikes named Dunlap, Seeley, Burkett, Ladd, Marshall, and Thrall joined Sallyards to form a strip of oil 30 miles long and a mile, or a little less, wide. The Norwegian community was included in that strip which became known as the "Golden Lanes." It was typical of the so-called "stepping-stone

sands."

The Norwegians and their neighbors who were fortunate enough to have wells come in on their lands, earned money on each acre that was included in the lease, and for every barrel of oil that was taken, the landowner usually received  $\frac{1}{8}$  of its value.

Although the area did not become a major camp as did Teterville, Kenbro, Thrall, Sallyards, etc., oil field houses lined the River Road from the Lapland Sore and School to Holverson Schoolhouse, a distance of three miles. A number of the houses also extended east from the Holverson School and a small store was erected across the road from the school. Other houses were scattered here and there. The landowners received payment for the houses being on their property. To earn extra cash some folks cooked for the oil workers who had no families.

The oil years began in the 1920s and were on the decline by the 1930s. An occasional pump can still be seen at this time (1999), but the oil business is basically over in Greenwood County.

The church benefitted a great deal from the new wealth of many of its members. Other benefits reaped by the church during the oil years were the installation of electricity, graveled roads, and many new faces at the services.

In 1926, the women of the Ladies' Aid held their first bazaar and supper at the Holverson School. During those oil years the small stone school building had been dismantled and replaced with a frame building which had space for two classrooms. That made the building large enough to accommodate the event that the ladies planned. They earned \$78.50 for the church that evening! There have been bazaar and suppers every year since that time.

The pastor during the Depression was C. H. Hjortholm. He had come in 1928 and remained throughout the hard times. Rev. Hjortholm was the last pastor to have Norwegian services. He conducted both Norwegian and English services, not because there were many still speaking Norwegian, but because many

members enjoyed them and would stay for both services. They particularly enjoyed singing their hymns in Norwegian. After Rev. Hjortholm left in 1937, there were no longer any services in the Norwegian language.

In the summer of 1941, the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Congregations made a major decision which had an impact on the church property. They voted to deed the north acre of land, which was the location of the cemetery, over to the South Salem Township Board. They felt the Township Board would be more able to keep the grounds mowed and could easily open graves with their township road equipment. They were also given the task of keeping the records and selling plots.

The Board of Trustees of the church accomplished the transaction on August 23, 1941, and it still prevails at this writing.

During the late 1950s, the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church received word from their synod that it was unlikely that they could send another pastor to the small congregation that was having financial problems. At the same time the Christ Lutheran Church in Eureka was having financial problems also, and their synod suggested that the Lutheran congregations should consider a merger.

A great deal of time and thought went into planning the merger. It was decided that one Church Council would be the governing body of both the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church and Christ Lutheran Church of Eureka. They would both continue to have services using one pastor at both churches. It was agreed to sell the St. Paul's Church and parsonage. It was a difficult decision for all three congregations, but they were left with little choice.

The merger was consummated on June 1, 1958. Dr. Alfred Young, president of the Central States Synod of the United Lutheran Church, presented the address at the service of praise and thanksgiving which marked the merger of the three congregations. The Rev. Eugene L. Smith, who had been interim pastor for both

churches, continued to be the pastor until 1967.

At the time of the merger, records showed that forty weddings had taken place, and 103 members had been baptized in the Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church between 1926 and 1958.

The congregations merged without any serious problems. Every member had the privilege of attending whichever service they chose. Many of the members attended both if it served their schedules to do so.

The Ladies' Aid of the country church became a part of WELCA (Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), the organization to which the town ladies belonged. Because the country ladies wished to meet together and continue to make quilts and do other needlework for their traditional bazaar they were called the Dorcas group. The group in town chose to continue having program-type meetings so they were called the Cotta group. Once a month they would meet together.

The dinner and bazaar that had been started by the Dorcas (Ladies Aid) continued as it had been in the Holverson School. The town group (Cotta) would join them for the occasion, contributing food for the meal and handiwork. Friends, former members, and relatives came from near and far. Local auctioneers took over the sales. The function continued to become larger each year. It brought in more money which helped finance missions, parsonage repair, and helped with an emergency fund for the Church Council.

By the 1970s it was beginning to be noticeable that fewer folks were attending services at the Upper Fall River Evangelical Church. All of the parents wanted their children to be in Sunday School. The children wanted to be with their school friends so the parents brought them to Christ Lutheran Church where there were much larger classes.

On June 8, 1978, twenty years of merged life was celebrated by members of the two congregations at Christ Lutheran Church. Rev. Eugene L. Smith, pastor of

the congregations at the time of the merger, delivered the sermon. Holy Communion was celebrated, and special music was presented for the occasion. Following a covered dish dinner, those present enjoyed a musical in the afternoon.

Sometime in the 1980s, it was decided to have services only on the first and third Sundays at the Upper Fall River Church because the congregation had become even smaller. That small group continues to be there for every service.

On Sunday, October 23, 1994, the combined membership of Lutherans celebrated 125 years of ministry in Greenwood County. It began with the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation on October 5, 1869, in the home of Ole S. Ladd. Four years later the Christ Lutheran Congregation and the Otter Creek Congregation were organized. Several past ministers were in attendance. Bishop Charles Maahs delivered the sermon.

During recent years, the annual dinner and bazaar outgrew the Holverson School. It is now being held in the Christ Lutheran Church basement. The most recent gathering netted \$3550. One quilt, which was made by a lady from the Upper Fall River community, brought the \$1000.

The Upper Fall River Evangelical Lutheran Church remains the symbol of the hard-working, practical, and kind people who made an important impact on the populous of Greenwood County.

Descendants of the pioneers can be found in many walks of life. Some chose to remain ranchers and farmers. Others pursued careers as teachers, doctors, etc. Two young Norwegian men have positions in our state government in Topeka. They all can trace their background to the Upper Fall River Evangelical Church and the faith that was passed down to them by their forefathers.

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